Bul - 8/19/73

Taylor Grant . . . Has This to Say

The Incredible Mayor Meets

CBS owned station WCAU

Taylor Grant was fired last September from his job as radio commentator as the result of pressure from the Rizzo administration.

Using a polygraph to "show" Frank Rizzo's lack of credibility is like putting a padded bra on Raquel Welch. Or defacing a picture of Salvadore Dali with a false moustache.

In a society surfeited with sham, there must be bigger purposes to be served than the selling of *synthetic* sham. Yet in the week we've just been through, the bigger headlines, locally, were made by what might be called the double-shammy. Since man's losing battle with the machine is no longer news, someone must have signalled for a changeup—like a prominent, *phony* man, losing big, to a *phony* machine.

Promotional stunting of this sort cannot "show" anything that would add substance to the burdens we've all been bearing, since the Rizzophrenia outbreak began. It can produce only a temporary rise in the ratings and circulation of some news media; perhaps an illusion that this staid city has been saved from reality for a little while longer. And — last, and by all means least — it can give a few of us not-so-staid but slanted commentators a rare chance to reveal how surprisingly bipartisan we can be, when challenged to review an event as bizarre as this:

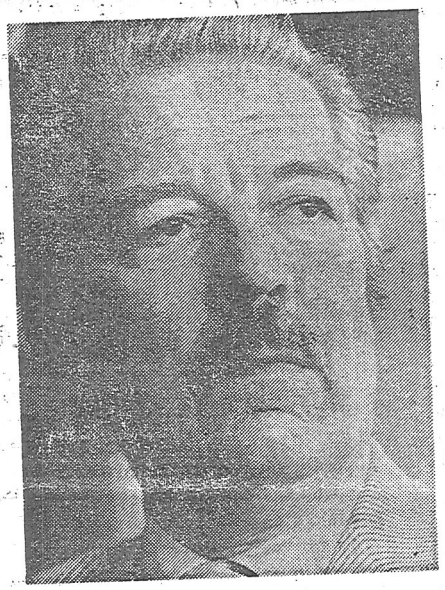
The Incredible Mayor Meets the Unbelievable Machine.

To me, the old "plague-on-both-your-houses" approach has never been more applicable.

Inadmissible Evidence

Nor would I expect much argument from informed observers, as far as my dim view of the polygraph is concerned. Its fallability is too well-known for detailed rehashing here. One fact says it all: there's scarcely a court in our land, and none in our Commonwealth, that will consider anything this contrivance says as admissible evidence.

The fallability of Frank Rizzo is, of course, another matter. I'll take a back seat to no one in my deep disrespect for our mayor, though there have been times when I've had to fight through quite a crowd to get there. Even now, a perusal of the original reports on his horrendous experience with the polygraph, suggest that his unpopularity is increasing by leaps and bounds.



Taylor Grant

This leads to some questions of my own: why have this week's delightfully damning charges against the mayor been hung on such flimsy thread, when he's left so much strong rope laying around all these years? Why have so many members of the news media made such a Big Case out of this relatively mundane political hassle, when all the while their own

the Unbelievable Machine

files are filled with stories of greater deceits, more damaging to larger numbers of people.

No Contraption Needed

Periodically, the Rizzo lies of great magnitude have been reported, accurately. From his days as police commissioner, when he personally pressed for the hiring of some officers with long, bad records (which they concealed, and he covered up). Through the early days of his chaotic administration — the broken pledges to keep the schools open, to cut down the costs of almost everything but his home and office. Right on up to his last news conferences, with all of their bamboozling contradictions. The record shows these lies to be self-evident. No seemingly scientific contraption is needed to confirm or deny any of them.

To be sure, he has gotten away with a few, wrapped in the kindergarten journalese of the many chameleon-type former newsfolk he has lured away from the media. There is also a major fabrication or two still lying around underplayed.

His trip to the White House comes to mind — remember? That day when he came home with the news that his idol, Richard Nixon himself, had assured him of $52 million worth of help for our floundering city. To this moment, too many Philadelphians remain unaware that Frank Rizzo not only got no such pledge, but also never got in to see the President, I've been told. Just had a few words with some underling or other, of the sort we've been seeing a lot of on the Sam Ervin TV show lately.

'Tool of Intimidation'

By and large, however, there have been enough good reporters telling us what comes out of the mayor's mouth "like it is" — which is to say, untrue — to make all this glorification of the polygraph unwarranted.

Also a little dangerous, since such disproportionate publicity tends to overlook the fact that the primary use of the polygraph has been as a tool of intimidation in the already overloaded toolsheds of some over-zealous police. Continued pretense that it really does detect lies and liars also could give a firmer toehold on the world to those techno-crazies whose worship of gimmickry would soon render words obsolete — were it not for such consistent truth-seekers in our midst as Joe Daughen. Jon Katz, Claude Lewis and Andrea Mitchell.

The eyes, ears, and conscience of an honest, intelligent reporter can never be replaced by any of the countless new gadgets currently ballyhooed as tools of the trade.

Weekly Box Score

Most of the time, I believe the words of the humans described above. It is through them, plus my own experiences, not through some kind of a Thing, that I have learned to disbelieve Frank Rizzo, with a rigorous regularity.

Out of all this, then, a suggestion:

Why not start keeping a box score — now — on the credibility of all public officials. Let the media maintain a record of every deception to date, made public with the constancy of the weekly big league batting averages. Let the number of lies told by Frank Rizzo be documented and published with same care, attention, and publicity currently accorded Henry Aaron's pursuit of the home run record.

This just might de-emphasize all this nonsense about polygraphs. Better yet, it might even ultimately dethrone Rizzo.

Incidentally . . . if the name of Pete Camiel seems conspicuous by its absence from this column, read nothing into it, please — pro or con. No offense Pete . . . but I've tried to address the issues: namely, that Frank Rizzo lies and polygraphs should not be required to prove it. Claiming a victory in a credibility quarrel with Rizzo would be like boasting of striking out the pitcher.